REPORT
OF THE
VCCS
TASK FORCE
ON
ASSESSING
CORE
COMPETENCIES

APPROVED BY THE
STATE BOARD
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES
JULY 18, 2002

VIRGINIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SYSTEM
REPORT OF THE VCCS TASK FORCE ON ASSESSING CORE COMPETENCIES

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Report of the VCCS Task Force on Assessing Core Competencies i
Executive Summary

The Final Report of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education recommended that the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) adopt and implement a matrix of performance measures of academic quality and institutional efficiency. Each public institution of higher education in Virginia must develop and implement a Quality Assurance Plan that (1) defines core competencies for written communications, oral communications, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning, critical thinking, and technology skills; (2) identifies measures to assess students’ knowledge and skills; and (3) provides a vehicle to present results publicly.

The VCCS is required to report on writing and information literacy in 2003, scientific and quantitative reasoning in 2004, and critical thinking and oral communication in 2005. Student outcomes assessment results of the selected core competencies are to be reported as part of the VCCS Reports of Institutional Effectiveness. Submission of the report is required under Chapter 1073 Acts of Assembly, Item 162B.

The VCCS began its work by establishing task forces to develop plans to assess writing and technology. As the work of the writing and technology task forces progressed, the need to integrate that work in the development of the plans for the four remaining competencies became apparent. Therefore, the Chancellor appointed a new task force, *VCCS Task Force on Assessing Core Competencies*. Not only was the new task force to look for ways to integrate the assessment activities of core competencies, it was asked to continue the English 111 student-writing sample pilot and to develop evaluation tools and on-line tutorials for assessing information literacy.

Keeping the plan defined in the context of our mission and values while remaining sensitive to the unique needs of the communities we serve were important attributes defined in the charge to the task force. Specifically the task force was asked to address the following three tasks: (1) develop a plan, taking into consideration work that has been done in other states, to assess the six core competencies—writing, information literacy, critical thinking, quantitative analysis, scientific reasoning, and oral communications—mandated by the State Council, (2) carry forward the work begun by the task forces on writing and technology (information literacy), and (3) identify the implications that assessing core competencies may have on the VCCS general education requirements and assessment reporting and make recommendations on how to address those implications.

The task force was asked to submit its plan to assess core competencies and related findings to the Chancellor in time for review by the Advisory Council of Presidents at its April meeting and for approval by the State Board at its May meeting, with subsequent transmittal to the State Council.
The requirement that institutions of higher education in Virginia define and assess student mastery of six core competencies provides significant challenges and exciting opportunities for the VCCS. The task force has carefully considered our capabilities, debated assumptions to guide our work, and sought lessons to be learned from state-level assessment activities across the nation. The plans advanced in this report, will move us beyond compliance with the mandate, to pursue improved student learning, and an enriched environment for teaching and learning. In order to refine, build ownership and operationalize the plans, the task force offers these short- and long-range recommendations.

Short range, the task force recommends that:

- The Academic and Student Affairs Council and faculty at each college review these plans with more business and senior institution partners and have opportunities to offer suggestions for refinements at regional meetings in September.

- Each college identify where students acquire the core competencies in their degree programs (since this will vary from college to college).

- The VCCS implement the plan for writing assessment: colleges agree to common prompts, 10% sample of English 111 courses selected to yield 5% sample of students, several colleges assess all sections, and faculty score writing samples using grid.

- The VCCS implement the plan for information literacy assessment: colleges identify courses for the application assignment as defined by objective four criteria in the plan, select 10% sample of students, and provide faculty to complete the assessment using the rubric designed for this purpose.

- The VCCS implement the pilot plan for assessment of quantitative/scientific reasoning: VCCS faculty develop and pilot a quantitative/scientific reasoning assessment tool as indicated in the tentative timeline (Attachment L).

- The Chancellor form a new task force, with several members of the existing task force continuing for continuity, to review the state of general education priorities in higher education today and the needs of the Commonwealth for general skills, values, and knowledge of our graduates. Attention should be given to the general education needs of students in transfer and occupational/technical degree programs. The task force should reaffirm general education elements that need to be kept and offer recommendations for changes that can be justified by the evidence discovered through their work.
Colleges continue to support these assessment efforts by encouraging faculty and administrators to actively participate and supporting travel for planning and implementation sessions. The System Office continues to assist with the expenses for centralized assessment activities.

Long range, the task force recommends that:

- Colleges pursue a through-the-curriculum emphasis and identify writing intensive courses in the second year of each degree program to be used for writing assessment.

- Colleges pursue a through-the-curriculum emphasis and identify oral communication intensive courses in the second year of each degree program to be used for oral communication assessment. In some cases, this assessment process could be combined with the evaluation of information literacy.

- As these assessment efforts mature, colleges should acknowledge the performance of students deemed highly competent by awarding them certificates of achievement.
Background and Introduction

The Final Report of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education recommended that the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) adopt and implement a matrix of performance measures that would allow it to measure academic quality and institutional efficiency. In developing the report, SCHEV coordinated its efforts with the Department of Planning and Budget to minimize the duplication of information on performance measures required of colleges and universities.

The VCCS 2001 Plan for the Reports of Institutional Effectiveness was developed in consultation with a VCCS committee appointed by the Chancellor and reviewed several times by VCCS and SCHEV staff as well as the Advisory Council of Presidents and Advisory Committee of Deans and Provosts. The report contains information profiling the VCCS along with comparators and narrative that will allow those using the report to understand the VCCS performance relative to historical performance, standards, peers, or aspirations. Last May, staff submitted to the State Council the VCCS 2001 Reports of Institutional Effectiveness as approved by the State Board. The formal Reports of Institutional Effectiveness can be accessed through SCHEV’s website at http://research.schev.edu/roie/.

Another recommendation highlighted in the Final Report of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education was the creation of a Quality Assurance Plan. The plan listed three goals to (1) define core competencies for written communications, oral communications, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning, critical thinking, and technology skills; (2) identify measures to assess value-added to students’ knowledge and skills; and (3) provide a vehicle to present results publicly. As a result, the State Council adopted a plan to develop student competency measures in writing and technology for use in the 2002 Reports of Institutional Effectiveness. Although the State Council requested that the institutions submit plans for assessing writing and technology by May 2001, a one-year waiver to these deadlines was granted the VCCS due to the scope and complexity of the task for the System. The State Council has also acknowledged that value-added assessment may not be practical for most colleges and universities.

In developing guidelines for assessing student writing and technology competencies, the State Council requested that each institution develop a definition and standard for competence in writing and technology and a method for measuring the desired competencies. To this end, the Chancellor appointed two system-wide task forces to develop plans to address the State Council’s request. Between April and September 2001, the writing and technology task forces met and developed plans to define and assess the competencies. Last September, three regional meetings were held to ensure a review of the draft plans to assess writing and technology competencies. Each college sent a team of individuals, including faculty, academic deans, assessment officers, and other appropriate staff, to one of the meetings. College teams were well prepared to present the major points raised during campus discussions concerning each plan. Approximately 150 individuals attended the meetings, with teaching faculty representing half of those in attendance.

Comments from the colleges centered on three areas: the assessment process, general education requirements, and use of results. College representatives felt that the assessment process developed should not overburden the student, college, or system. For example, the plan to assess writing and technology should also consider how the other required competencies—critical thinking, oral communications, quantitative reasoning, and scientific reasoning—could be integrated. In addition, the system’s current general education requirements might need revision in light of a standardized assessment approach. Last, many of colleges wondered if comparisons would be drawn between the colleges and how the results...
would be interpreted. There was a strong feeling that the results of the assessment activities should help the colleges improve instruction and not just serve as a compliance activity.

In light of the comments made during the regional meetings, the Chancellor formed a new task force to develop a plan for assessing the six competencies required by SCHEV. The new task force, VCCS Task Force on Assessing Core Competencies, consists of academic deans, teaching faculty, librarians, assessment coordinators, and system office staff. Attachment A provides a copy of committee membership.

The Chancellor’s November 6 memorandum outlined the charge to the task force and established a completion date for its work. Not only was the new task force to look for ways to integrate the assessment activities of core competencies, it was asked to continue the English 111 student writing sample pilot and to develop evaluation tools and on-line tutorials for assessing information literacy. Keeping the plan defined in the context of our mission and values while remaining sensitive to the unique needs of the communities we serve were important attributes defined in the charge to the task force. Specifically the task force was asked to develop a plan that addressed the following three tasks.

1. Develop a plan, taking into consideration work that has been done in other states, to assess the six core competencies—writing, information literacy, critical thinking, quantitative analysis, scientific reasoning, and oral communications—mandated by the State Council. This plan should—
   a. define competency,
   b. set standards for student performance,
   c. identify where in the college curriculum students acquire the competencies,
   d. determine who should be assessed,
   e. determine how to conduct valid and reliable assessments, and
   f. interpret the results.
2. Carry forward the work begun by the task forces on writing and technology (information literacy).
3. Identify the implications that assessing core competencies may have on the VCCS general education requirements and assessment reporting and make recommendations on how to address those implications.

The task force was asked to submit its plan to assess core competencies and related findings to the Chancellor in time for review by the Advisory Council of Presidents at its April meeting and for approval by the State Board at its May meeting, with subsequent transmittal to the State Council. The VCCS is required to report on writing and information literacy in 2003, scientific and quantitative reasoning in 2004, and critical thinking and oral communication in 2005. Student outcomes assessment results of the selected core competencies are to be reported as part of the VCCS Reports of Institutional Effectiveness. Submission of the report is required under Chapter 1073 Acts of Assembly, Item 162B.

**Organization and Work of the Task Force**

Over the last five months, the task force has met and organized its work. Even before its first face-to-face meeting, the task force chair, Dr. Doug Boyce, asked the committee to spend some time doing a capability or SWOTs analysis. Task force members recognized we have significant strengths in the VCCS for defining and assessing core competencies. Colleges have taken assessment seriously for over a decade and they possess substantial expertise. Working together, we have achieved significant economies?
of scale on several fronts. We have worked through other system-wide challenges with success and have learned a great deal through the work done on writing and information literacy. We do, however, face some serious challenges or weaknesses. It is difficult for us to collaborate because of the independent spirit in each college. This is a complex task and it will be difficult to achieve consensus as a system. We have also learned that making real improvement based on assessment results is difficult and serious assessment initiatives are expensive.

We did recognize that we have a wonderful opportunity to clarify and enhance general education outcomes for our students. We also see tremendous opportunities for building on the excellent assessment work done by personnel across the state. Finally, we acknowledged the threat of resistance from within the system if we impose an assessment process that is too rigid and narrowly prescriptive and the threat of a poorly conceived and executed set of plans would expose us to the ridicule of our senior institution colleagues. As a task force and as a system, we need to build on our strengths, address our challenges and weaknesses, take advantage of our opportunities and deal with anticipated threats as we develop and implement these assessment plans. We believe the VCCS is up to the task! For those interested in more details from capability or SWOTs analysis, please refer to Attachment B.

The SWOTs analysis coupled with the results from the regional meetings helped the committee to articulate a set of assumptions used to guide the development of the System’s plan to assess the six core competencies. These assumptions are:

1. This is not just a SCHEV mandate; somehow, we will make it beneficial to students and faculty across the VCCS in a way that is consistent with our mission.

2. This assessment initiative will be conducted with existing resources and consideration must be made for how it can be realistically completed along with other assessment efforts including those required by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

3. The focus of our efforts will be on students graduating from associate degree programs. While we will begin with a common definition of each competency, we may not ultimately expect the same level of achievement for students graduating from all transfer and occupational/technical degrees.

4. Initial assessment efforts will be recognized as pilots, evaluated for effectiveness, and refined over time. Although the plans call for assessing students at the point of graduation, results from the pilot projects may indicate a need to revise sampling procedures.

5. We plan to assess two of the six core competencies each year, reporting on them every three years.

6. These assessment efforts must be sufficiently embedded into accepted teaching and learning practices to motivate students to do their best. If assessments are conducted in the context of courses, they must be based on something more criterion-based than course grades.

7. Colleges should have some flexibility to use optional assessment settings (for example: in class, on assessment days, or on demand testing) but with the same standardized procedures.

8. We must be clear as to whether we are attempting value-added as opposed to criterion-referenced assessment; the former might be theoretically preferable, but in some or most cases, we will need to settle for the latter given the mobile nature of our students.
9. This initiative will be used as a basis for reviewing the current elements of general education in the VCCS (see VCCS Policy Manual, p. 2A-5) since they include, but go beyond the SCHEV Core Competencies.

10. Assessment results will be communicated to SCHEV for the entire VCCS, but we may elect to use individual college results within the VCCS for appropriate improvement activities.

The task force met five times (November 28, January 18, February 15, March 1, and April 4). We divided into work groups to concentrate our efforts on the assessment plans for each competency. Most meetings involved some time discussing issues as an entire task force and some time in focused workgroup sessions. Between meetings task force members read resource documents, collaborated with others in their work groups and sought advice from members of their own college communities. Dr. Lonnie Schaffer from SCHEV met with us on November 28 to put this part of the Reports on Institutional Effectiveness into perspective and to clarify State Council expectations. Several members of the task force attended a meeting on core competencies assessment sponsored by SCHEV to facilitate conversations between personnel from senior institutions and community colleges across the state. In addition, several task force members participated on a panel discussing statewide core competency assessment efforts at the spring Virginia Assessment Group (VAG) meeting. We also benefited from the feedback provided by several business people at our March 1 meeting. The highlights of their comments are available as Attachment C. Their observations have had a decided impact on task force plans.

National Context

Part of the task force’s charge was to develop our plans “…taking into consideration work that has been done in other states.” The assessment of student learning as a public policy priority has spread from the K-12 arena to higher education. Much of the incentive for the evaluation of student outcomes in the late 1980s and 1990s came from regional accreditation or pockets of special political circumstances. A few states adopted common standardized testing for specific competencies, but most states gave colleges a significant level of freedom to define outcomes and assess student learning, as they deemed appropriate. Now the legislative call for accountability is growing louder, but efforts vary greatly across the country. The task force looked at several resources to get a clearer picture of where we are today.

Perhaps the most telling indication of how the nation is doing came in the report Measure Up 2000, prepared by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. This state-by-state report card issued grades for the following: K-12 preparation for college-level study, college participation rates, affordability, completion rates and the benefits of higher education for each state. On a sixth category, the quality of learning outcomes, each state received an “Incomplete.” The question and answer section of the report states the “…Incomplete grades highlight a gap in our ability as a nation to say something meaningful about what students learn in college” (measuringup2000.highereducation.org).

As the VCCS works on making the assessment of core competencies as effective and meaningful as possible for students, faculty and the public, what can we learn from the efforts of colleagues across the nation? In an article this past year, Peter Ewell provided an excellent overview of how and why states assess student learning and some of the enduring challenges we all face in the process (“Statewide Testing in Higher Education,” Change, March/April 2001). He identifies three motivations for testing efforts:
1. **Certification of Individual Student Achievement**: to check student readiness to go on to the next level of study; all or most students are assessed. Examples include the College-Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) in Florida (for reading, writing, and math), Regents’ Testing Program (RTP) in Georgia (for writing), the Texas Academic Skills Program (for reading, writing, and math). “Only rarely….are aggregated test scores used to draw conclusions about overall institutional or system performance.”

2. **Promoting Institutional Improvement**: to guide state-level rewards in an equitable manner by using standardized test results to focus attention on areas that need improvement. Institutions can select from different testing instruments and frequently samples of students are used for assessment activities. Examples include Tennessee (ACT COMP or College BASE, results are used for performance-based funding) and Missouri (any nationally normed instrument, results used for the state’s Funding for Results Program).

3. **Assessment for Accountability**: to track the performance of the entire system over time, using common test results that are communicated to the public. Examples include Arkansas (ACT CAAP- writing, mathematics, reading, and scientific reasoning) and Utah (piloted CAAP, developing statewide course-based online tests in writing, mathematics and American institutions). “Most such approaches are designed to track performance of the entire system over time, using test results as a benchmark of progress.”

In the same article, Ewell points out some of the major challenges states face with comprehensive efforts to assess student learning: Legislators are used to getting K-12 assessment results and do not understand why it seems so much harder to make progress with similar efforts in higher education. Statewide testing is expensive. There are few established instruments; developing new ones takes time and money. Legislatures change and so do their priorities. Institutional contexts are diverse and outcomes will be too. It is hard to motivate students to do their best on standardized tests that are not embedded in their courses or affecting their advancement toward graduation. Universal testing gets better results, but is more expensive.

In a background study for *Measuring Up 2000*, Peter Ewell and Paula Ries have exhaustively reviewed the efforts of states to monitor student mastery of some basic general education competencies (i.e., communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking). In *Assessing Student Learning Outcomes*, Ewell and Ries identified six broad activity categories to characterize the approaches of different states in December 2000 (http://measuringup2000.highereducation.org/assessA.htm).

1. **Common State-Wide Testing**: (some states nationally-normed and some state-developed) Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas (6)
2. **Mandated Statewide Assessment**: (local choice of nationally-normed test) Missouri, Oklahoma (2)
3. **In Process of Developing a Common Approach to Outcomes Assessment**: Colorado, Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia [six state mandated core competencies](8)
4. **Mandated Statewide Assessment**: (locally developed or locally chosen instruments; reporting required) Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New York, North Carolina (8) [this is where Virginia was before 2000]
5. **Mandated Statewide Assessment**: (locally developed or locally chosen instruments; no reporting required) Illinois, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin (5)
6. **No visible State Requirement for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes**: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi,
The task force reviewed a wide array of assessment instruments available for our consideration. The best single recent source of information about them is *Network News*, Volume 21 (3) January 2002 available online at [www.sheeo.org](http://www.sheeo.org). The most commonly used standardized instruments for general education have been available for more than a decade. They include the ACT’s College Outcomes Measures Project (COMP) that is no longer supported, the ACT’s Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), the Academic Profile offered by ETS, and the University of Missouri’s College-Base Examination. All are multiple-choice instruments, although some include writing or critical thinking exercises in their long versions. Task force members have expressed little interest in these options because many VCCS colleges have experimented with them and found the results do not lend themselves to institutional improvement, it is difficult to motivate students to do their best on them, and they are expensive to use on a wide scale.

ACT’s Work Keys assessments are used by many VCCS colleges and the task force considered their potential for defining and evaluating student achievement on some of the core competencies. Work Keys measures four levels of complexity. Each level has been mapped to the Ohio Proficiency Outcomes for grades 6, 9, and 12. Work Keys is a national system for teaching and assessing workplace academic skills in secondary, postsecondary, and adult training programs. It has three components: profiling to identify skills and skill levels needed to succeed in specific jobs; assessments to measure skill levels (primarily given to employees and vocational students); and instructional support to address workplace requirements more directly. Work Keys is a great tool to help evaluate and improve employees already in the workplace and candidates for positions that have been profiled. The task force has concluded, however, that the Work Keys System does not adequately apply to the broader core competencies in transfer or occupational degree programs as intended by SCHEV.

Peter Ewell (“Statewide Testing in Higher Education”) and Peggy L. Maki (“From Standardized Tests to Alternative Methods,” *Change*, March/April 2001) identify several alternatives to the standardized test approaches outlined earlier. In one way or another, all of their suggestions attempt to structure assessment activities to more authentically accomplish some good things for students, faculty and institutions. For example, assessments might be used to provide a “certificate of achievement” beyond the student’s degree, encouraging them to do their best on assessment activities that are not clearly linked to course requirements. Course grades that are routinely discounted for assessment purposes can be validated through an external auditing process that affirms high and explicit standards. The benefits of bringing faculty together to define competencies, build assessment tools and collaborate on the implementation can spark levels of ownership and creativity that will never result from the unenthusiastic adoption of a standardized test. The case can be made that the combination of standardized and locally developed assessment methods can yield rich results. The plans below pursue an eclectic approach that will allow us to experiment with several of these options in the years ahead.

**ASSESSMENT PLANS**

As mentioned earlier, the task force divided into work groups to prepare assessment plans for each competency. The Task Forces on Writing and Technology continued their efforts to pilot and refine the plans they developed between April and September 2001. The plans outlined below reflect the additional work they have completed. Technology came to be defined in terms of information literacy because of the long-standing emphasis at the colleges on assessing computer competencies. The assessment plans...
follow in this order: writing and information literacy (2002-2003), quantitative and scientific reasoning (2003-2004), critical thinking and oral communication (2004-2005). This is the chronological order for implementing the plans determined by SCHEV.
VCCS Plan for Assessing Writing Competence

Definition: The faculty recognizes that students pursuing occupational/technical or transfer degrees in the Virginia Community College System must develop effective writing skills in order to succeed in the workplace as well as in future academic pursuits. Effective written discourse by these students must demonstrate that they possess the ability to develop and express complex ideas clearly, coherently, and logically in a style appropriate for both purpose and audience. This written discourse must also demonstrate that the students have mastered accepted standards of written communication. Therefore, competent writing will demonstrate mastery in focus, content, organization, style, and conventions.

Objectives:

1. **Focus**: State purpose that addresses the writing task in a thoughtful way.

2. **Organization**: Organize content with effective transitions and effective beginning and ending paragraphs.

3. **Content**: Develop logical and concrete ideas with effective use of paragraph structure.

4. **Style**: Use appropriate and precise word choice where language and sentence structure are alive, mature, and varied.

5. **Conventions**: Demonstrate few mechanical and usage errors with evidence of control of diction.

Assessment Instrument:

The VCCS conducted a writing assessment pilot workshop on March 15-16, 2002. Results of the pilot can be found at the end of the plan to assess writing competence. During the workshop, participants used a revised scoring grid. The *VCCS Writing Sample Scoring Grid* can be found in Attachment E. A strong recommendation from the English faculty participating in the workshop was to use common writing prompts for next year’s assessment. They also recommended that the scoring grid and prompts be distributed to all English faculty by May 31, 2002.

Standards of Performance:

Standards will be set based on the use of the rubric (see Attachment E) after completion of next year’s assessment of student writing.

Administrative Design Process:

1. **Who will be assessed?** In fall 2002, the System Office will randomly select 10% of the English 111 sections at each college after drop-add. The writing prompts should be administered to all students in the selected sections close to the end of term. In early November, the System Office will produce a list of randomly selected program-placed students from the designated sections. The colleges’ chief academic officers will be responsible for submitting enough student papers to yield a
5% sample per college. The task force hopes that some colleges will be willing to implement this assessment in all sections of English III. In future years, writing samples may be produced from writing-intensive courses meeting revised VCCS general education requirements by students who apply to graduate.

2. **How often?** At least every three years or more often at college’s discretion.

3. **When?** End of course assessment

4. **Where and How?** Use of common writing prompt assigned close to the end of term, written out-of-class, typewritten of 350-500 words, with no documentation required. The holistic grading process that was used for the pilot project will be replicated next year for data reporting. The System will encourage faculty other than English to participate in the process.

**Use of Results:**

1. **Presentation for public:** Initial use will provide information to SCHEV, VCCS, and the colleges on how students across the VCCS are performing in writing as operationally defined by the VCCS objectives and instrumentation.

2. **Internally for improvement:** Since all program-placed students enrolled in English 111 will produce a writing sample, individual colleges may replicate the holistic assessment process. Local results can be used to evaluate the college’s success with respect to student achievement in writing in relation to course objectives and goals.
Writing Pilot Results

The VCCS conducted a writing assessment pilot workshop on March 15-16, 2002. The pilot project was designed to (1) train VCCS English faculty on holistically scoring methodology, (2) score student-writing samples selected from a five percent (5%) random sample of program-placed students enrolled in all sections of English 111 in the fall 2001 term, (3) evaluate the adequacy of the sampling designed for the pilot, and (4) make recommendations for improvement. In addition, system-wide baseline and college-specific results were to be shared with the colleges in late spring. Results of the pilot are highlighted below.

Train VCCS English Faculty

English faculty from each of the colleges were invited to participate in a workshop supported by the System Office. The workshop was held March 15-16 at the Sheraton Park South in Richmond and was facilitated by Dr. Carole Bencich, Professor of English from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The process of holistic scoring requires readings by several readers. Before scoring begins, readers score practice papers – “range finders” – and discuss standards for scoring. During the Friday morning session, the faculty participated in a three-hour training session, scoring authentic student writing samples provided through the pilot project. Attachment D provides excerpts from the document distributed by Dr. Bencich as part of the training session.

Score Student Writing Samples

Holistic scoring emphasizes what is right rather than what is wrong with a piece of writing. All judgments are independent; readers should not see one another’s scores. The rubric used during the training session listed a scale of 1 to 6, with six representing a highly competent writer (see Attachment E for a copy). During the afternoon session, the faculty rated 444 student-writing samples. Two English faculty members read each paper assigning a score of 1-6 with the scores added together to produce a total from two to 12. Holistic scoring always uses an even-number scale (commonly 4 or 6), eliminating an “average” ranking and forcing an “above or below average” decision. When standards are carefully established and raters are carefully trained, holistic scoring produces high reliability.

Readers could disagree by one point in a judgment on a paper. If the disparity was two points or more, a third reader (or table leader) read the paper and made a decision. The percentage of papers needing a third reader should fall below 15%. Almost 30% of the papers read during the pilot needed a third reader. In addition, the participants discarded 10 non-scoreable samples; yielding 434 scored student-writing samples.

Evaluate the Adequacy of the Sampling

For the purposes of the pilot project, a 6% random sample of program-placed students enrolled at each college in English 111 in the fall 2001 term was generated at the System Office. The total number of program-placed students enrolled in English 111 in the fall term totaled 12,496. The colleges’ chief academic officers were given a list of students by social security number, section number, and campus and asked to collect writing samples. Parameters for the type of writing assignments included the last or second-to-last out-of-class graded typed writing assignment (essay or documented essay) that was not a personal narrative, of at least three pages in length.
Each faculty member was asked to provide a short 4-7 line explanation of the sample being submitted; including a brief description of the assignment, the intended audience, and brief statement as to what research and/or documentation was required for the essay. Copies of the assignments without student, teacher, or college identification were sent to the System Office. The chief academic officer was responsible for verifying that the student essays matched those identified through the sampling process. Six hundred twenty five student-writing samples were expected to be returned in order to yield a 5% sample. Due to a variety of reasons—late withdrawals, short-course completions, stop outs, no assignment cover sheets—444 of the student samples were returned (about 3.5%).

For next year’s assessment, the sample size selected needs to increase from 6% to at least 10 to 15% in order to yield a sample size of 5%. System office staff needs to select the sample as close to the end of the fall semester as possible to alleviate the number of students who have withdrawn. System staff also noted that in sorting the over 400 writing samples, some colleges did not include assignment sheets or sent papers identifying students, faculty, and/or the college, making the sorting process for staff cumbersome. As mentioned above, several writing samples were judged non-scoreable, primarily due to grading marks found on the papers, thus excluding them from the total samples rated. This posed an unexpected dilemma for staff, since it became impossible to match a non-scoreable paper with a particular college, a necessary criteria in returning college-specific results to the colleges.

**Make Recommendations for Improvement**

English faculty who participated in the holistic-scoring workshop provided comments about what they had learned during the session and made specific recommendations about how to improve the process for next year. Their comments and recommendations can be found in Attachment F.

Next year, faculty requested that the rubric be shared with all English faculty before the start of the fall semester. They suggested that more direction and time be dedicated on scoring practice papers during the training session.

As mentioned above, almost 30% of the papers read during the pilot needed a third reader. The faculty and consultant agreed that this was due to the wide range of writing assignments presented—everything from a two-page expository to a 12-page research paper. The faculty agreed that for the purpose of next year’s assessment that all colleges use a common writing prompt. Several examples of the types of writing prompts that may be used can be found in Attachment G.

Much discussion occurred about the type of prompts to use and how they should be administered. The majority of faculty believed that the writing for this assessment project should be the last out-of-class essay or paper a student writes, that it be short between 350-500 words, typewritten, that the prompt be positive but involve some analytical element and not require documentation. Essentially, one genre should be used. The consultant stated that when student papers are assessed holistically, students should have access to the scoring rubric before they write the paper. She stated further that discussing rubrics and using them for classroom assessment could help students develop standards for effective writing.

The holistic scoring session promoted communication about the teaching of writing among faculty participants. The session also resulted in a strong consensus among the faculty that the colleges should have the same goals for English 111. The faculty recommended that a session on the results of this assessment and the implications for English 111 be shared at the English Peer Group Conference.
scheduled for this fall. Ultimately, the English peer faculty should make recommendations for improving writing competence system-wide.

Much debate occurred as to when the writing assessments should take place. The faculty echoed the set of original assumptions used to develop a definition and standard for writing competence made by the previous VCCS Task Force on Writing. The Writing Task Force stated that:

1. Student mastery of writing improves, over time, through continuous writing. Writing in courses other than English is essential, and competence in writing should be the responsibility of faculty throughout the college, not solely the responsibility of English faculty.
2. Writing is a skill that is critical to student success and empowerment. In developing writing standards, the VCCS should pay particular attention to ensuring writing competence in students who intend to pursue degrees and/or continue their studies at four-year institutions.
3. Students in all degree programs should be expected to demonstrate the same writing competencies. Writing assignments should engage students in a meaningful way.
4. Improvement in critical thinking skills should be an important component of VCCS writing competence standards. It is assumed that students are either proficient with writing mechanics after completing high school, or that students without these skills test into developmental courses through system-wide English placement standards.

The task force further stated, “While the initial emphasis on state-level reporting will be on students in English 111, a long-range plan for evaluating writing competence across the curriculum should be considered by the VCCS.” While the faculty engaged in the writing assessment pilot project agreed with the Writing Task Force’s initial emphasis on assessing writing competence through English 111, they strongly recommended that the System consider a system-wide writing-across-the-curriculum requirement and that students’ writing competence be assessed closer to graduation.

**System-wide Baseline and College-specific Results**

As mentioned above, of the 444 student-writing samples randomly selected for the holistic scoring pilot project, ten samples were non-scoreable primarily due to grading marks found on the papers. Of the 434 student-writing samples read, about 30 percent were rated below competence, 46% were rated as developing or adequate competence, and 24% were rated reasonably to clearly and consistently competent. See Attachment E for the sample scoring grid used for this project. The average score for all papers read was 6.5 points out of a possible 12. A mid-range score is expected of community college students enrolled in a first-year composition course.

Even though 70% of the student papers read received a score in the competent range, the English faculty members participating in the pilot cautioned of premature reporting of the data due to the high rate of papers needing a third reader (28%) coupled with the wide variance in writing assignments. The faculty highly recommended that no standards be set using the pilot data but to do so next fall with the use of a common writing prompt. Based on this recommendation, the faculty also recommended that no college-level data be reported this year.

**A Final Word about Accountability versus Improvement**

The State Council has stated that the competencies should represent the skills and knowledge expected of any graduate from the institution. Certainly focusing on community college writing skill at the beginning
of a student’s college experience does not begin to address writing competence expected of community college graduates. However, assessing student writing competence through English 111 does capture 100% of students enrolled in transfer programs and over 85% of those enrolled in occupational-technical programs at the beginning of their community college experience. In fact, of the over 12,400 program-placed English 111 students enrolled in fall 2001, over 60% are traditional age (18 to 21), 44% are first time, and 64% are full-time. About 8% of these students had previously taken a developmental English course and the majority (over 65%) is program-placed in transfer programs. The students participating in the pilot adequately represent the subpopulation of English 111 students. See Attachment H for copies of student characteristics of the English 111 subpopulation and English 111 pilot group.

Clearly, English 111 is the only composition course commonly taken by all VCCS community college program-placed students. If the goal is to assess the writing competence of community college graduates, then the VCCS general education requirements need to be revised to reflect that goal. In the short term, common objectives and goals should be set for English 111 so that clear expectations are defined for writing competence throughout the System.
VCCS Plan for Assessing Information Literacy Competence

**Definition:** Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”

*American Library Association (ALA) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*

**Objectives:**

(Developed primarily from the American Library Association Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and James Madison University’s Information Literacy Skills for General Education)

1. The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
2. The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
4. The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

See Attachment I for Performance Indicators and Outcomes related to each objective.

**Assessment Instruments**

A test based on one developed at James Madison University will be used to assess student mastery of Objectives 1-3 and 5. Each college will identify at least one course in each degree in which an application assignment is embedded that addresses the Objective 4 competency. The application assignment will be completed there. The application assignment must meet information collection characteristics appropriate for the use of the assessment rubric (see Attachment J for the criteria and Attachment K for the assessment rubric). While the student may participate in the test portion at any time prior to the course containing the assignment, the student must satisfactorily complete the test before the end of the course. To encourage students to apply themselves, it is suggested that the application assignment have five percent of its grade value based upon satisfactory completion of the test.

The assessment instruments and procedures are currently being pilot tested. Several colleges have designated sections to take the online test during the month of April. For the results we hope to gain information about the effectiveness of our testing procedures and the perceptions of faculty of our instrument.

With regard to the application portion of the assessment, one college is currently reviewing the criteria for selecting an application for several of its programs of study and is pilot testing the rubric with an appropriate application. After the feedback is reviewed, other colleges will be asked to begin the designation of courses with an application assignment that would be part of the assessment. Pilot testing would then continue with these courses in the fall 2002.
Standards of Performance

In order to be assessed as having a satisfactory level of competence on these informational literacy objectives during the pilot study, the work group tentatively proposes students will need an average score of three on a four-point scale for all five objectives with no score below two on any individual objectives. The implications of this standard will be reconsidered after the pilot assessment has been completed.

Administrative Design Process

1. **Who will be assessed?** For purposes of the pilot this spring, students will be randomly selected from available courses at the colleges represented by the Technology Competency Taskforce. In the future all VCCS colleges will randomly select a 10% sample of individuals who are registered in the courses identified as containing an application assignment.

2. **How often?** The initial pilot assessment will be conducted during April 2002. In the future, the assessment will be completed at least once every three years or more often at the college’s discretion.

3. **When?** During the semester in which the technology competency is assessed.

4. **Where and How?** The test portion must occur on a specified computer. Each college can select the most appropriate venue for this computer-based test, but must employ the same standardized procedures (e.g., time allowed, access or lack of access to resources, level of assistance from proctors).

Use of Results

1. **Presentation for public:** Results will detail the number and proportion of students who were able to satisfactorily demonstrate these information gathering and presenting objectives.

2. **Internally for improvement:** Computer test results will provide specifics of areas needing additional attention. The application rubric will provide information about the aspects of the application that needs attention. Colleges will design teaching and learning strategies to help students improve their mastery of knowledge and skills most frequently missed in the assessment process.
VCCS Plan for Assessing Quantitative Reasoning Competence

**Definition:** A person who is quantitatively literate (i.e., competent in quantitative reasoning) possesses the skills, knowledge, and understanding necessary to apply the use of numbers and mathematics to effectively deal with common problems and issues. A person who is quantitatively literate can use numerical, geometric, and measurement data and concepts, mathematical skills, and principles of mathematical reasoning to draw logical conclusions and to make well-reasoned decisions.

**Objectives: VCCS Degree Graduates will be able to**

1. Use logical and mathematical reasoning within the context of various disciplines.
2. Interpret and use mathematical formulas.
3. Interpret mathematical models such as graphs, tables and schematics and draw inferences from them.
4. Use arithmetic, algebraic, geometric, and statistical models to solve problems.
5. Estimate and consider answers to mathematical problems in order to determine reasonableness.
6. Recognize and communicate the appropriate applications of mathematical and statistical models.
7. Represent mathematical information numerically, symbolically, and visually, using graphs and charts.

**Assessment Instrument:**

The Quantitative Reasoning Assessment Instrument will be a locally developed instrument constructed by VCCS faculty and assessment personnel. The instrument will consist of two sub-scales: 1) Quantitative Reasoning and 2) Scientific Reasoning. This will enable students to be assessed in both competencies using the same instrument and still enable the VCCS to report the two competencies separately to SCHEV. Each subtest (quantitative reasoning and scientific reasoning) will contain a sufficient number of items to allow for reliable separate sub scores in each subtest area. The locally constructed instrument will strive for reliability coefficients above .70 for college and program level decisions. Reliability coefficients will reach .90 or better prior to use for decisions on an individual student level. Evidence of concurrent, content and predictive validity will also be gathered. Validity of the instrument will be examined through a series of content, concurrent, and predictive validity studies. Sufficient validity evidence will be documented prior to use of resulting information for decision making at the institutional or individual student level.

The assessment will be a common test and classroom instructors will not score the assessments. Scoring and reporting can take place through the local college assessment office or through the VCCS System Office for scoring and reporting.
Standards of Performance:

Once pilot data are collected, a standard can be set quickly with a process such as the “Bookmark” procedure, which requires a two-day workshop in order to set such standards. After standards are set, the initial data are used to determine what percent of students would or would not have met standards.

Administrative Design Process: (see the Proposed Timeline for the Scientific and Quantitative Assessment in Attachment L)

1. **Who will be assessed?** All students who apply to graduate at the end of the term will be assessed. Students who complete the assessments but do not graduate due to failure to meet graduation requirements will be removed prior to reporting, as they will no longer meet the criteria as a “graduating” student.
2. **How often?** At least every three years or more often at college’s discretion
3. **When?** After application for graduation is made and prior to graduation
4. **Where and How?** In class, on assessment days, or on demand testing, but with the same standardized procedures (e.g., time allowed, access or lack of access to resources, level of assistance from proctors). Test developers will be asked to establish the standardized procedures.

Use of Results:

1. **Presentation for public:** Initial use will provide information to SCHEV, VCCS, and the colleges on how students across the VCCS and at each college are performing in quantitative reasoning as operationally defined by the VCCS objectives and instrumentation. The VCCS will report system level data to SCHEV with college level data returned to the individual colleges.
2. **Internally for improvement:** In addition, individual colleges may elect to break down student scores by program and use that information as part of the college’s program review process. Once the instrument achieves .90 or better reliability coefficients, individual schools may elect to provide and use individual student achievement information for certification purposes.
VCCS Plan for Assessing Scientific Reasoning Competence

Definition: Scientific reasoning is characterized by adherence to a self-correcting system of inquiry, the scientific method, and reliance on empirical evidence to describe, understand, predict, and control natural phenomena.

Objectives: VCCS Degree Graduates will be able to

1. Generate an empirically evidenced and logical argument.
2. Distinguish a scientific argument from a non-scientific argument.
3. Reason by deduction, induction and analogy.
4. Distinguish between causal and correlational relationships.

Assessment Instrument:

The Quantitative Reasoning Assessment Instrument will be a locally developed instrument constructed by VCCS faculty and assessment personnel. The instrument will consist of two sub-scales: 1) Quantitative Reasoning and 2) Scientific Reasoning. This will enable students to be assessed in both competencies using the same instrument and still enable the VCCS to report the two competencies separately to SCHEV. Each subtest (quantitative reasoning and scientific reasoning) will contain a sufficient number of items to allow for reliable separate sub scores in each subtest area. The locally constructed instrument will strive for reliability coefficients above .70 for college and program level decisions. Reliability coefficients will reach .90 or better prior to use for decisions on an individual student level. Evidence of concurrent, content and predictive validity will also be gathered. Validity of the instrument will be examined through a series of content, concurrent, and predictive validity studies. Sufficient validity evidence will be documented prior to use of resulting information for decision making at the institutional or individual student level.

The assessment will be a common test and classroom instructors will not score the assessments. Scoring and reporting can take place through the local college assessment office or through the VCCS System Office for scoring and reporting.

Standards of Performance:

Once pilot data are collected, a standard can be set quickly with a process such as the “Bookmark” procedure, which requires a two-day workshop in order to set such standards. After standards are set, the initial data are used to determine what percent of students would or would not have met standards.

Administrative Design Process: (see the Proposed Timeline for the Scientific and Quantitative Assessment in Attachment L)

1. Who will be assessed? All students who apply to graduate at the end of the term will be assessed. Students who complete the assessments but do not graduate due to failure to meet graduation
requirements will be removed prior to reporting, as they will no longer meet the criteria as a “graduating” student.

2. **How often?** At least every three years or more often at college’s discretion
3. **When?** After application for graduation is made and prior to graduation
4. **Where and How?** In class, on assessment days, or on demand testing, but with the same standardized procedures (e.g., time allowed, access or lack of access to resources, level of assistance from proctors). Test developers will be asked to establish the standardized procedures.

**Use of Results:**

1. **Presentation for public:** Initial use will provide information to SCHEV, VCCS, and the colleges on how students across the VCCS and at each college are performing in scientific reasoning as operationally defined by the VCCS objectives and instrumentation. The VCCS will report system level data to SCHEV with college level data returned to the individual colleges.
2. **Internally for improvement:** In addition, individual colleges may elect to break down student scores by program and use that information as part of the college’s program review process. Once the instrument achieves .90 or better reliability coefficients, individual schools may elect to provide and use individual student achievement information for certification purposes.
VCCS Plan for Assessing Critical Thinking Competence

**Definition:** Critical thinking is deciding what to believe and how to act after careful evaluation of the evidence and reasoning in a communication.

**Objectives**: The student who demonstrates competent critical thinking skills will be able to:

1. Discriminate among degrees of truth or falsity of inferences drawn from given data.
2. Recognize unstated assumptions or presuppositions in given statements or assertions.
3. Determine whether certain conclusions necessarily follow from information in given statements or premises.
4. Weigh evidence and decide if generalizations or conclusions based on the given data are warranted.
5. Distinguish between arguments that are strong and relevant and those that are weak and irrelevant to a particular question at issue.


**Assessment Instrument(s):**


**Standards of Performance:**

Students are expected to perform at the 50th percentile or higher using established community college norms.

**Administrative Design Process:**

1. **Who will be assessed?** Students matriculated in associate degree programs.
2. **How often?** At least every three years or more often at the college’s discretion.
3. **When?** After application for graduation is made and prior to graduation.
4. **Where?** Scheduled test date or capstone course (if applicable).

**Use of Results:**

1. **Presentation for public:** Number and proportion of students sampled from VCCS colleges were at or above the 50th percentile norm for community college students.
2. **Internally for improvement:** College personnel will develop curriculum improvement plans designed to enhance the critical thinking competencies of students in degree categories or majors that seem to consistently score below the 50th percentile.
VCCS Plan for Assessing Oral Communication Competence

**Definition:** Although it is recognized that oral communication refers to a variety of forms for spoken discourse—public speaking, small group communication, interpersonal communication, and interviewing, among others—the specific type of communication to be assessed for associate degree graduates is presentation before a group in a professional or public setting. Therefore, for this purpose oral communication is defined as the ability to deliver a spoken message of significant depth and complexity in a way that elicits an immediate response from an audience of understanding, appreciation, assent, or critical inquiry. Oral communication requires of the communicator a demonstrated grasp of general purpose and specific occasion; the effective organization of material with emphasis on key ideas; the stylistic use of vivid and clear language as well as vocal and bodily expressiveness; and meaningful, appropriate, and sustained engagement with the audience.

**Objectives***: VCCS Degree Graduates will be able to demonstrate

1. Appropriateness - Idea development, use of language, and the organization of ideas for a specific audience, setting, and occasion are appropriate.

2. Verbal Effectiveness - Idea development, use of language, and the organization of ideas are effectively used to achieve a purpose.

3. Nonverbal Effectiveness - The nonverbal message supports and is consistent with the verbal message.

4. Responsiveness - Communication may be modified based on verbal and nonverbal feedback. Speakers / listeners demonstrate active listening behaviors.

*These objectives are based on an assessment rubric developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 1998, Paula Marie (Blunck) Usrey (503) 275-9577. This oral communication assessment rubric is provided as Attachment M.

**Assessment Instrument**

The Oral Competency Assessment Instrument will be either selected or developed by a designated group of VCCS faculty in the area of Speech as well as other disciplines. The group will be charged to review relevant materials from professional organizations such as the National Speech Association (http://www.natcom.org) as well as the complete assessment tool of the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory cited above (http://www.nwrel.org/comm/topics/oralcomm.html, see Attachment M). The latter provides detailed descriptors for each objective, sorted into three levels of competence—advanced, developing, and emerging—that can be rated on a 5-point scale. The chosen instrument will be used to assess actual student performance based on a set of standardized prompts and assigned expectations.

**Standards of Performance**

Once the chosen assessment instrument is piloted, the work group of faculty will meet to set standards for meeting the competency.

**Administrative Design Process**

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1. **Who will be assessed?** A sample (10 to 15%) of degree students who apply and are approved for graduation will be assessed. Students who complete the assessment but do not graduate by the specified time will be removed prior to reporting the results.

2. **How often?** The pilot assessment will be conducted during 2003-2004. In the future, the assessment will be completed at least once every three years or more often at the college’s discretion.

3. **When?** After application for graduation is made and prior to graduation.

4. **Where and How?** At times and locations determined by the college and accessible to students. Audiences of at least three people will be present. Presentations will be targeted for seven minutes and will be cut off after ten minutes. Audience members will direct to the speaker at least two questions or comments related to the substantive content of the presentation. As an inducement for good performance, students will be provided with an individual critique of their presentation in line with the four objectives noted above.

   (Note: This proposed Administrative Design Process will be reviewed by the faculty group, with possible modifications resulting.)

**Use of Results**

1. **Presentation for public** – Data will be provided to the VCCS and the colleges on how students are performing in relation to the standards set for the oral communication competency. The VCCS will report system-level data to SCHEV for posting on ROIE and college-level data to the individual colleges for their own use.

2. **Internally for improvement** – Individual colleges may elect to break down student scores by program and use that information as part of the college’s program review and improvement process. As indicated above, students will be provided results of individual performance.
**Timetable and Next Steps**

The task force has made significant progress on its assignment, but collectively we realize there is much more to be done before these plans can be finalized and implemented. We need a broader range of input to refine the plan and generate greater ownership of the total effort. As noted below, that process will begin significantly with the June 6 meeting of the Academic and Student Affairs Council (ASAC). The task force has agreed to meet June 14 to make refinements in the report and plans based on input from ACOP and ASAC. During the year that follows, we propose campus reviews leading to regional hearings where teams of faculty and administrators present their questions, concerns and ideas for improvement. The task force sees much of the detailed implementation of assessment plans growing out of more grassroots work groups made up of faculty members, administrators and assessment coordinators who express an interest in following through on these stages. The calendar below will give the reader a general outline of the minimal timetable involved. SCHEV has recently given colleges at least one extra year to move forward with assessment of these six competencies. That extra time is not reflected below.

### 2001-2002
- Pilot Writing and Technology (Information Literacy) Assessments
- Complete Report – Submit to the Chancellor and ACOP (April)
- Report to the State Board (May)
- Secure Feedback from ASAC (June)
- Task Force Meets to Refine Report and Plans (June)

### 2002-2003
- Regional Hearings for VCCS & Partner Review of Plans (Fall 2002)
- Discussion at Key Peer Group Meetings
- Implement Writing & Technology (Information Literacy) Assessment
- Develop and Pilot Quantitative and Scientific Reasoning Assessment

### 2003-2004
- Implement Quantitative and Scientific Reasoning Assessment
- Develop and Pilot Critical Thinking and Oral Communication Assessment

### 2004-2005
- Implement Critical Thinking and Oral Communication Assessment

**Impact on Campus Assessment Efforts and Reporting**

Assessment processes at VCCS colleges have had their ups and downs over the past sixteen years since *Senate Document No. 14, 1986 Virginia General Assembly*, provided the legislative mandate for assessment reporting and SCHEV established the initial guidelines for colleges and universities to respond. As a system, our institutional effectiveness processes have matured. The early skepticism about student outcomes assessment has turned into a general awareness that such requirements are not going away and we need to conduct them more effectively and learn how to improve student learning as a result.

One thing that has definitely happened over these years: we are assessing more aspects of learning than ever before. We started with an emphasis on developmental studies, general education and majors. Over
the years, we added assessments of off-campus learning; student transfer experience; dual enrollment courses; the impact of assessment on restructuring efforts; special topics; the relationship between assessment, planning and budget development; and distance education. From the late 1980s until the mid 1990s, reports were expected every other year for most colleges. Since 1995, colleges have submitted a report each year and we have been able to put some topics on a cycle that makes the annual reporting requirements more manageable. Nevertheless, institutional effectiveness processes required for regional and specialized accreditation have continued to grow over the decade and the cumulative effect has been significant.

Throughout this recent history of VCCS assessment activity, each college has been able to define for itself nearly all competencies for general education and the majors. We had common general education elements, but each college could describe learning objectives from their frame of reference and use whatever assessment methods they chose to employ. In 1997, the VCCS approved the “Computer Competency Requirements” that became section 5.2.0.1 of the VCCS Policy Manual. This addition provided specific objectives that defined what all students completing a curriculum of more than 45 semester credits would be able to do with a computer. However, colleges use a variety of assessment methods to document student competencies.

The expectation that the VCCS will have common definitions, objectives and assessment activities for each of the core competencies being addressed in this report, has implications for how we conduct general education assessment activities at the colleges and how we report the results. The first question many members of the task force raised was “Will these replace current general education assessment efforts at all the colleges?” If the answer is “yes,” this moves us away from the freedom colleges had in the past. It also means we have to engage faculty members and administrators from the colleges in the creation of these system-wide assessment processes in such a way that they feel ownership and are willing to embrace the changes. If the answer is “no,” then we ask faculty members and administrators, already feeling overwhelmed by institutional effectiveness efforts, to conduct parallel general education assessment activities. The new assessment activities for the SCHEV Reports on Institutional Effectiveness will most likely be viewed as a compliance activity and given weaker levels of support by colleges.

As the assumptions for our work indicate earlier in the report, task force members believe: “This is not just a SCHEV mandate; somehow we will make it beneficial to students and faculty across the VCCS in a way that is consistent with our mission.” Therefore, we believe most colleges will want to embrace these assessment efforts so they can replace what they are currently doing to evaluate general education student outcomes and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. That being said, the VCCS will need to be sensitive to several issues.

In the past, because outcomes assessment results were usually not comparable, there was not a tendency to even try to make comparisons between colleges. Task force members have repeatedly expressed concerns that, even though we will report system-wide results to SCHEV, we will tend to make comparisons among ourselves. That is probably true, but it needs to be done in the spirit of using results to make improvements and not one-upmanship. Another issue to remember is that colleges have invested heavily in a variety of assessment procedures and we need to draw from that past work and current expertise to address the challenges ahead. Many colleges have, for example, participated in the creation and refinement of STAGE, a general education assessment tool used by several institutions. The STAGE instrument may not meet our needs for assessing these core competencies, but those who have worked on...
STAGE need to be welcomed into the development process and be acknowledged for their past work. They have learned many valuable lessons and have resources that need to be applied to this new initiative.

Assessment reporting will always be a challenge, but plans to conduct and report on these assessment activities every three years will make them more manageable once they have been fully developed and implemented. If we refine the VCCS general education elements and pursue a common approach for competencies beyond the six required for SCHEV, we will need to be sensitive to the time it will take to develop and implement additional assessment plans. Furthermore, for the next several years we will be piloting assessment plans for two competencies while we are fully implementing plans for two other competencies. We may need to scale back some other reporting expectations during that time. Our efforts to systematically address such institutional effectiveness elements does have the potential to meet needs for SACS-COC and, most importantly, make us stronger, more effective community colleges.

Implications for General Education

As noted in the “Background and Introduction” to this report, the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education required each public institution of higher education to develop a Quality Assurance Plan to address these six competencies: written communications, oral communications, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning, critical thinking, and technology skills. In 1990, the VCCS General Education Task Force proposed the following eight general education elements for all colleges in the system: communication, learning skills, critical thinking, interpersonal skills and human relations, computational and computer skills, understanding culture and society, understanding science and technology, and wellness (Section 2.IV.C, VCCS Policy Manual). While there is clearly overlap between these two lists of general education components, there are also differences.

We might be tempted to look for a simple way to harmonize the two groups and recommend a modified list for the system to approve and include in the policy manual. It is clear that the VCCS general education elements not addressed by the Blue Ribbon Commission are important. The Business Partners with whom we met on March 1, 2002, were particularly interested in “interpersonal skills and human relations.” They made it very clear that all employers would be pleased to see us give this same level of attention to the interpersonal skills of students upon graduation. But, given the complexity of our charge, we have not been able to do a thorough review of current thinking about general education elements in higher education and are not prepared to offer a compromise list. The 1990 VCCS General Education Task Force spent a year reviewing the literature, debating what students in transfer and occupational/technical degree programs needed, before making their recommendations.

Consequently, the VCCS Task Force on Assessing Core Competencies recommends a new task force be formed, with several members continuing for continuity, to review the state of general education priorities in higher education today and the needs of the Commonwealth for general skills, values and knowledge in our graduates. Attention should be given to the general education needs of students in transfer and occupational/technical degree programs. The task force should reaffirm general education elements that need to be kept and offer recommendations for changes that can be justified by the evidence discovered through their work.
Conclusion

The requirement that institutions of higher education in Virginia define and assess student mastery of six core competencies provides significant challenges and exciting opportunities for the VCCS. The task force has carefully considered our capabilities, debated assumptions to guide our work, and sought lessons to be learned from state-level assessment activities across the nation. The plans advanced in this report, will move us beyond compliance with the mandate, to pursue improved student learning and an enriched environment for teaching and learning. In order to refine, build ownership and operationalize the plans, the task force offers these short- and long-range recommendations.

Short range, the task force recommends that:

- The Academic and Student Affairs Council and faculty at each college review these plans with more business and senior institution partners and have opportunities to offer suggestions for refinements at regional meetings in September.

- Each college identify where students acquire the core competencies in their degree programs (since this will vary from college to college).

- The VCCS implement the plan for writing assessment: colleges agree to common prompts, 10% sample of English 111 courses selected to yield 5% sample of students, several colleges assess all sections, and faculty score writing samples using grid.

- The VCCS implement the plan for information literacy assessment: colleges identify courses for the application assignment as defined by objective four criteria in the plan, select 10% sample of students, and provide faculty to complete the assessment using the rubric designed for this purpose.

- The VCCS implement the pilot plan for assessment of quantitative/scientific reasoning: VCCS faculty develop and pilot a quantitative/scientific reasoning assessment tool as indicated in the tentative timeline (Attachment L).

- The Chancellor form a new task force, with several members of the existing task force continuing for continuity, to review the state of general education priorities in higher education today and the needs of the Commonwealth for general skills, values, and knowledge of our graduates. Attention should be given to the general education needs of students in transfer and occupational/technical degree programs. The task force should reaffirm general education elements that need to be kept and offer recommendations for changes that can be justified by the evidence discovered through their work.

- Colleges continue to support these assessment efforts by encouraging faculty and administrators to actively participate and supporting travel for planning and implementation sessions. The System Office continues to assist with the expenses for centralized assessment activities.
Long range, the task force recommends that:

- Colleges pursue a through-the-curriculum emphasis and identify writing intensive courses in the second year of each degree program to be used for writing assessment.

- Colleges pursue a through-the-curriculum emphasis and identify oral communication intensive courses in the second year of each degree program to be used for oral communication assessment. In some cases, this assessment process could be combined with the evaluation of information literacy.

- As these assessment efforts mature, colleges should acknowledge the performance of students deemed highly competent by awarding them certificates of achievement.
VCCS Taskforce on Assessing Core Competencies

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Attachment B

Capability Analysis for Core Competencies Assessment Effort

Strengths

1. **System-wide Capabilities** - Outcomes assessment programs have been in place at VCCS institutions for over a decade. We are committed to excellence--and assessment is a way to improve. We have economies of scale as a system. We have diverse perspectives with common goals and values.

2. **Recent Work & Personnel** - We can build on the good work that has been done by the writing and information technology task forces. We have a wealth of helpful feedback and suggestions from the regional meetings held last fall. We have a diverse, experienced committee. Other gifted personnel are available in the VCCS.

3. **Senior Institutions** – Senior institutions are working a year ahead of us and we should be able to learn from their experience.

Weaknesses/Challenges

1. **Institutional Coordination** – It is difficult to get twenty-three colleges to be consistent. Colleges have approached assessment independently. This is an enormous project, considering all six competencies, for 23 colleges. Tough to find measures that meet all colleges' needs. Tough to find measures that will be satisfactory to the public and meet all colleges' needs. Encouraging colleges to give up what they currently do. We are slow to move as a system. SCHEV's expectations could change after a great deal of work is done. Achieving consensus among 23 colleges is a challenge.

2. **Making Real Improvements** – It is difficult to use results for meaningful improvement of teaching and learning. Aggregated data for the system responds to a reporting requirement, but how does that help the public know more about what our students are learning?

3. **A Complex Task** - No single identifiable student assessment product covering all 6 core competencies is currently in place. Do we need pre and post assessment of competencies to show levels of improvement? Will the public be satisfied with anything other than a standardized, norm-referenced test even though we don't want to go there? Reckoning with the issue of sample size for each College. We lack experience assessing certain competencies. What are the implications for VCCS assessment reports? We lack common definitions.

4. **Lack of Adequate Resources** – This is an un-funded mandate. With budget deficits in Virginia, this is surely a challenge. However we do this, it will be expensive and time consuming.
Opportunities

1. **Use Existing Resources** - Many existing assessments already in use - What are other community colleges doing? This is an occasion to demonstrate our accomplishments. Look at the successful assessment projects already being done at the colleges and modify them for system-wide needs. Building these assessments can build faculty ownership and system-wide collaboration. What can we learn from our national assessment experts to help us?

2. **Real Improvements Could Result** - It is an opportunity to better prepare our students for 4-year schools and work. Make this an opportunity to maximize the educational experience for our students, especially those who will not go beyond an associate degree (preparation for their real world. This is an occasion to re-examine general education in the VCCS. We can make Virginia a leader in general education assessment. Standardize the assessment process statewide. SHEV is pushing and there is a political climate suitable for implementation.

Threats

1. **External Disapproval** - Inevitable comparisons will be made between 2-yr. students and 4-yr. students at the completion of their baccalaureate careers. This process could politicize the education of students. If not done right, results could call into question the quality of VCCS instruction. Folks may question the reliability and validity of our measures even if approved by SCHEV. Implicit, but clear, is the concept that course grade judgments made by faculty are inadequate and suspect measures of academic achievement.

2. **Internal Tensions** - Resistance - both from students and faculty - how many "tests" can we expect students to take. Do we use class time for assessments? Do students have to complete assessments on their own time? Again - cost - we cannot ignore how costly it is both financially and in terms of time. Faculty and staff at the colleges may not be able to carry out the assessments -- lack of time, support, resources, buy-in. Who will do the heavy lifting for these projects? Deans need to take the lead, not just "push down" the responsibility to division chairs. If we are going to have local hearings on individual items, we must be sure to listen and incorporate the information.
Meeting with Business Partners  
Friday, March 1, 2002, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., PVCC

Introduction: In order to get feedback on the definition of competencies as they relate to the world of work, the following Business Partners met with the task force: Martha Cooper, software consultant, Dr. Shyla Ipsen, consultant on the SOLs with VDOE, Dr. R. Grant Tate, DreamCatcher-Bridgewater Innovations Group, and David Topper, State Farm Insurance. These individuals made the following comments while they viewed a PowerPoint presentation that explained the context of the work and preliminary conclusions of the task force.

Writing Competence: Grant Tate noted that many students going into graduate school could not write at this level. He also added that employers would be interested in students being able to complete effective business letters and reports as well as academic essays. Martha Cooper agreed and said she endorsed the definition and objectives.

Information Literacy Competence: David Topper asked if attention is given to the knowledge and skills that are assumed by these objectives (e.g., how to appropriately frame research questions and determine where to go for reliable information). Grant Tate and Martha Cooper expressed appreciation for the definition and objectives, but Martha wondered if students get this in high school. Grant said he would expect several of these would be difficult for first and second year college students, especially “evaluates information and sources critically....” In addition “understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information....”

Oral Communication Competence: Shyla Ipsen asked if the technical requirements of correct speech are expected. We shared a copy of the more detailed version of the objectives and the assessment tool to indicate that they are addressed. Grant Tate asked if person-to-person communication skills are addressed. They really are not emphasized here, but should be part of the “interpersonal skills and human relations” element of the VCCS general education requirements. Martha Cooper endorsed the idea of requiring and assessing this competence in a variety of courses and not only speech courses.

Next Steps: Grant Tate asked when employers would learn about our efforts to assess these competencies. He observed that this initiative could be communicated very positively to make it clear to employers that we are serious about preparing students with good employment skills. He also observed that these objectives seem very ambitious. Task force members commented that we would need to distinguish between the ideals of the learning objectives and the standards we finally agree are minimally acceptable for graduates. Grant encouraged getting more employers involved in the review process this fall. Martha Cooper suggested working through the Society for Human Resource Managers with units that are active all over Virginia. We will need to gear our presentation to their frame of reference and concerns. Shyla Ipsen encouraged us to ask personnel at each college to identify which courses help students to develop these competencies in order to be sure they are addressed in the curriculum for each degree. David Topper asked if we would be giving this kind of attention to some basic workplace values such as demonstrated ability to complete tasks on time and showing up for work on time.
Virginia Community College System

Pilot Project to Assess Writing Competence

Sheraton Park South Hotel
Richmond, Virginia
March 15 - 16, 2002

Carole Beeghly Bencich
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Report of the VCCS Task Force on Assessing Core Competencies 33
Characteristics of Holistic Scoring

- Holistic scoring looks at the overall effectiveness of the paper, without judging individual traits like spelling, grammar, or organization. Writing is viewed as a unified, coherent whole.
- In holistic assessment, the standard is set within the group of papers being assessed, rather than imposing an “ideal” standard.
- Holistic scoring requires readings by several readers.
- The basis of holistic scoring is a quick and immediate judgment on each paper. Individual papers should be read in one to two minutes maximum, usually in folders of 20 papers each. Thus, readers should read one folder in about 40 minutes, taking at least a 10-minute break before reading the next folder.
- Readers may disagree by one point in a judgment on a paper. If the disparity is two points or more, a third reader (or table leader) will read the paper and make a decision.
- Holistic scoring emphasizes what is right rather than what is wrong with a piece of writing.
- All judgments are independent; readers should not see one another’s scores.
- Holistic scoring is not the best way to evaluate all student papers. It offers no feedback to students.
- When student papers will be assessed holistically, they should have access to the scoring rubric before they write the paper. Discussing rubrics and using them for classroom assessment can help students develop standards for effective writing.
- Holistic scoring always uses an even-number scale (commonly 4 or 6), eliminating an “average” ranking and forcing an “above or below average” decision.
- When standards are carefully established and raters are carefully trained, holistic scoring produces high reliability.
- A holistic scoring session can promote communication about the teaching of writing among faculty members.

Factors that Influence a Writer’s Success in Holistic Evaluation

- Time constraints
- Availability of a dictionary (especially for ESL writers)
- Availability of a word processor
- Choice of topics
- Audience constraints
- Availability of response
- Emotional or attitudinal influences

Individual Variances that Affect Holistic Scoring

- Length of paper
- Genre of paper
- Clarity of handwriting and/or photocopying
Variety of writing prompts
Context of writing situation
Topic of paper

Characteristics of Effective Writing

Focus
• Writer demonstrates an awareness of audience and task.
• Writer establishes and maintains a clear purpose.
• Writer sustains a single point of view.
• Writer exhibits clarity of ideas.

Content
• Information and details are specific to topic.
• Information and details are relevant to focus.
• Ideas are fully developed.
• Content reflects critical thinking, depth, and complexity.

Organization
• Logical order or sequence is maintained.
• Paragraphs deal with one subject.
• Logical transitions are made within sentences and between paragraphs.

Style
• Writer uses precise language.
• Writer uses effective word choice representing a range of vocabulary.
• Writer demonstrates voice, tone, originality of language.
• Writer uses variety of sentence structures, types, and lengths.

Conventions
• Irregular mechanics (spelling, capitalization, punctuation) are minimum and do not detract from meaning.
• Usage (e.g., pronoun references, subject-verb agreement) errors are minimal and do not detract from meaning.
• Sentence structure is standard, for the most part. Irregularities (such as fragments) may be intentional, as a matter of style.
### VCCS Writing Sample Scoring Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>clear &amp; consistent competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>clearly-stated purpose that addresses the writing task in a thoughtful way</td>
<td>effectively addresses the writing task and shows depth</td>
<td>addresses the writing task but may lack complexity</td>
<td>inconsistent sense of purpose; loose relation to writing task</td>
<td>confused sense of purpose; no evidence of connection to writing task</td>
<td>absence of any purpose or relation to writing task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reasonably consistent competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>well-organized content, with effective transitions; effective beginning and ending paragraphs</td>
<td>generally well-organized with appropriate transitions and relevant beginning and ending</td>
<td>some signs of logical organization with beginning, middle and end &amp; transitions between</td>
<td>inadequate organization; may have abrupt or illogical shifts &amp; ineffective flow of ideas</td>
<td>confused organization; no transitions; beginning and ending do not relate to content</td>
<td>no evidence of an organizational plan or intent to develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>adequate competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>substantial, logical and concrete development of ideas; effective use of paragraph structure</td>
<td>adequately and thoughtfully developed content with specific details or examples</td>
<td>partially developed content with some details or examples and appropriate paragraphing</td>
<td>incomplete development of content; may be vague, simplistic, or stereotypical</td>
<td>superficial development; inadequate, inappropriate or redundant details; inadequate paragraphing</td>
<td>weak ideas, with no supporting details and inappropriate conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>developing competence</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>appropriate and precise word choice; language and sentence structure are alive, mature, and varied</td>
<td>facility with language; mature range of vocabulary and control of sentence-level style</td>
<td>adequate language use, with some imprecise word choice; some sentence variety</td>
<td>inappropriate, imprecise or inadequate language; limited sentence variety</td>
<td>inadequate and simplistic language, with no variety and errors in word choice</td>
<td>no control over word choice; excessive errors in meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>inadequate competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>few mechanical and usage errors; evidence of superior control of diction</td>
<td>some mechanical, proofreading or usage errors</td>
<td>mechanical and usage errors that do not interfere with meaning</td>
<td>repeated weaknesses in mechanics and usage; pattern of flaws</td>
<td>mechanical and usage errors that interfere with writer’s purpose</td>
<td>mechanical and usage errors so severe that writer’s ideas are hidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>material from outside sources is well-integrated and documented consistently and correctly</td>
<td>sufficient and appropriate use of documentation and control of documentation style</td>
<td>accurate documentation, but may be inconsistent or used uncritically</td>
<td>incomplete documentation, with clumsy or formulaic citation style</td>
<td>awareness of need to document material from outside sources, but little consistency or correctness</td>
<td>ideas may be borrowed from outside sources without documentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Objective on outside documentation recommended by participants of the pilot to be omitted.*

**Non-Scoreable (NS)**
- is illegible; i.e., includes so many undecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response
- is incoherent, i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that response makes no sense
- is a blank paper
VCCS Assessment of Writing Competence through
Holistic Scoring Workshop: A Pilot Project
March 15-16, 2001

Comments from Faculty Participants about How to Improve
the Holistic Scoring Project for Next Year

Group One
- Specify when assessment should occur—ENG 111 or at graduation
- Rate samples holistically by trained faculty
- Mandate Writing-Across-the-Curriculum
- Specify what kinds of writing and how to describe the competencies

Group Two
- Establish models associated with rubric to help establish reliability
- Provide direction to readers—what is a 6 paper or 5 paper
- Define what competencies we expect at this level
- Assignments should be consistent, either all timed or all spontaneous
- Test at the end of ENG 112

Group Three
- Control the testing environment
- Use common prompt, students choose among 3-4 prompts
- Use papers from end of the semester
- Specify as in-class essay

Group Four
- Use consistent genre, without use of outside resources
- Require similar length
- Define specific goals for ENG 111
- Specify whether to assess graduates or every student
Comments about the Project from Faculty Participants

What I Learned
- English 111 and 112 mean so many different things between colleges, not to mention instructors
- My standards are low—these guys/my peers were BRUTAL in scoring the eight anchor papers
- Not many of us seem to know about holistic scoring
- This is very complex and interesting problem without easy answers
- My students compare favorably to students across the state
- I learned that this group cares passionately about teaching composition and that it can/may be possible to assess students’ writing assignments and capability
- I have learned we are under control of political thinking and a mindset I don’t like—this assessment FOCUS is part of our low morale problem
- This has been a helpful conference, thanks for the even handling
- My rating of papers is pretty standard with this group’s
- The people who are in charge—Genene, Linda, John, and Carole—have knowledge and are not mindless bureaucrats
- My students’ writing is similar to the writing of other students in the VCCS
- Despite our bell curve results, the writing is not very good
- I learned more about holistic scoring, which I will use in my classes
- I enjoyed exchanging ideas with other colleagues
- There are several benefits that I personally had as teacher: 1) types of assignments, 2) how my students in general perform compared to other system students; and 3) the necessity of clarifying evaluation goals for students
- I learned the importance within large scale assessment of forming a set standard from a single genre
- The colleges do not have the same goals for ENG 111

My Specific Recommendations for Next Year
- All colleges should use a specific guidelines set for English 111, including course objectives and course descriptions
- The writing assignment should be--
  - last essay/paper of semester that counts as a regular grade
  - in-class writing of 2-3 pages in length
  - give 50 minutes to write
  - students may bring notes
  - prompt should depend on guidelines for ENG 111
  - prompt preference—response or expository to a magazine article, distributed one week in advance

- The writing prompt should
  - not require documentation
  - out-of-class writing assignment
Use the same grid/rubric next year, assemble many of these same people next year, use the same prompt across the Commonwealth, and keep it in ENG 111.

I believe that ENG 111 does reveal what graduates can do because a lot of the time it is the last composition class taken.

Use the same prompt, make it positive, writing sample should take place in a class other than English, and should be an in-class-writing assignment.

Institute a system-wide writing-across-the-curriculum requirement.

Have a universal prompt, not outside sources, sample must be typed, and prompt should be argumentative.

Recommend that this be moved out of ENG 111. Options: graduate testing and/or second year (200-level humanities class).

Establish single prompt, length, and uniform process for writing sample.

Recommend that the statistics from this year be presented as beginning students.

If putting this at the end of ENG 111 means that you have to take into consideration ENG 111 goals.

Use one genre, no outside sources, 500-word composition, specific prompt.

**How I Would Like to be Involved Next Year**

- I would like to come back next year.
- Communicate with other members of faculty and administration on my campus.
- I will try to sell it (the process) to the English faculty at my college.
- In any way you need me to be.
- I would be willing to serve as a reader.
- Will be glad to serve on the committee establishing the prompt and would be interested in working as a reader again next year.
POSSIBLE PROMPTS

Wanda Smith, ESCC

1. Write an essay describing some element of your childhood that you see as quite different from its replacement for today’s children (for example, dolls, bikes, grade school, books, cartoons, Halloween).

2. Describe an occasion when you were forced or persuaded to do something you did not want to do at the time. After describing the situation, explain your analysis of the advantage or disadvantage of that experience.

3. If you have ever been involved in or witnessed a catastrophe of some sort—flood; a fire, an auto, plane, or boating accident; a hurricane; or a tornado or any other such experience, describe the event with specific details chosen to convey the feelings that accompany such catastrophes and explain how this experience has affected your life.

4. Write an essay describing a crisis or triumph you have experienced or witnessed. Explain how you feel about that situation today as you reflect upon it.

5. Have you ever done anything that most people would consider wrong but that you felt compelled to do at the time? Write about this experience, explaining the circumstances and either justifying your behavior or admitting your guilt.


Susan Coffey, VCCS

6. Describe your ideal job, explaining what characteristics would make this job ideal for you.

7. Write a paper about a person who has had a great deal of influence on your life (i.e., a relative, teacher, boss, mentor); explain why and how this person has influenced you.

8. Select one of the following proverbs and illustrate it with a story (real or imaginary): “A Fool and his Money are Soon Parted,” You Can’t Teach an Old Dog New Tricks,” or “A Bird in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush.”

9. Write a comparison-contrast paper on two movies you have seen, two books you have read, two college courses you have taken, two teachers/bosses you have had, or two jobs you have held.

10. Explain an important decision you have made; provide details on the background leading to your possible choices, how and why you made your decision, and the results of your decision.

Report of the VCCS Task Force on Assessing Core Competencies 40
More Possible Writing Prompts  
Submitted by Mountain Empire Community College English Faculty

**Topic 1:** Write an essay of approximately ____ words in which you describe the characteristics of a professional in your field of study. Consider new students at your college as your audience. Your goal in this essay is to inform your audience about what will be expected of them in this career. Consider the following as you plan your essay:

- What are the characteristics of a professional in your field of study? Consider the behavior, work ethics, and attitude that one should have to do professional work in your career. If you are undecided about a future career, think of yourself as a professional student.
- What is expected of a professional in your field? Think of the types of responsibilities or situations that you might encounter in your career.
- What skills and knowledge must a professional in your field possess?

**Topic 2:** Often people stereotype others based on ethnicity, gender, age, profession, and even the geographic region in which they live. We all know how damaging stereotypes can be and how inaccurate they can be. Write an essay of approximately ____ words in which you debunk a stereotype with which you are familiar. Your purpose is to help a general audience understand how the stereotype devalues the people it is applied to and to help them gain an appreciation for and understanding of members of this group. As you plan your writing, make a list of the common characteristics of the stereotype and use these to organize your explanations.

**Topic 3:** Change can be difficult for many of us, especially when we perceive the change negatively. However, often change can be healthy for people and for regions. Write an essay of approximately ____ words in which you describe the changes that have occurred in your community (neighborhood or town) over the past several years and what the significance of those changes has been. Your purpose is to help readers in your region understand these changes. Consider the following questions as you plan your writing:

- What are the causes of the changes?
- What effects on your community have these changes made?
- Do you see these changes as positive or negative and why?
- How can your community cope with or benefit from these changes?

**Topic 4:** Pretend that you are writing a record of your family history to pass on to your children. In an essay of approximately ____ words, explain one of the many rituals, traditions, or ceremonies your family follows when celebrating an important religious or national holiday. Explain the importance of this tradition to your family and why you feel your children should continue the tradition.

**Topic 5:** Every year, Virginia advertises its attractions to promote tourism in the state. Consider a natural or man-made setting in your region that you think Virginia should include in its tourism campaign. Write an essay of approximately ____ words in which you describe this site to readers outside the region. Your purpose is to persuade readers to visit this natural or man-made attraction.

*Note:* Topic #5 in the samples above calls for persuasive writing as well as description. This could make it a more complex writing task than the other four.
### System Summary Information

**Program-placed English 111 Students**

#### Student Characteristics, Fall Term 2001

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<th>Number in Subpopulation</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td>17 &amp; Under</td>
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<td>18 to 21</td>
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<td>22 to 24</td>
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<td>35 to 44</td>
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<td>45 to 59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out-of-state</td>
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#### Developmental Coursework

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>7328</td>
<td>58.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Course Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Load Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>7967</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>4529</td>
<td>36.2</td>
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</table>

#### Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Studies(AS)</td>
<td>1602</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Studies(ASA)</td>
<td>1195</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus. Admin (AS)</td>
<td>1087</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts (AA)</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (AS)</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### SYSTEM SUMMARY INFORMATION

#### English 111 Writing Project

**Student Characteristics, Fall Term 2001**

**Number of Participants**: 403*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>277</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amer Ind</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 &amp; Under</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 21</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 to 24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 59</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 &amp; over</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-time</td>
<td>173</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>50.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occ/Tech</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Unclass</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-state</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Developmental Coursework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>33.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Course Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Load</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Top 5 Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Studies(AS)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Studies(ASA)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus. Admin (AS)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts (AA)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (AS)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Of the 433 writing samples rated 403 could be used to match against the VCCS student data base. This was due to some colleges not providing student identification along with the writing samples or the inability of System staff to match non-scoreable items with a particular college. A total of 385 student matches were made. Less than 20 student matches could not be made due to data entry errors with student identification numbers. Similarly, the students reported as unclassified are errors resulting from mismatched identification numbers.
Attachment I

VCCS Plan for Assessing Information Literacy

Definition, Performance Indicators and Outcomes

**Definition**: Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” -American Library Association (ALA) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education

**OBJECTIVES, PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OUTCOMES:**
(Developed primarily from the American Library Association Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and James Madison University’s Information Literacy Skills for General Education)

**Objective One: The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicators</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defines and articulates the need for information</td>
<td>• Defines or modifies the information need to achieve a manageable focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources of information.</td>
<td>• Identifies key concepts and terms that describe the information need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Considers the costs and benefits of acquiring the needed information</td>
<td>• Identifies and locates information sources in a library: books, periodicals, electronic databases and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifies the need for and procedure for interlibrary loan services</td>
<td>• Describe how information is organized in a library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compares proprietary information to information provided for free. (i.e. library databases, Internet)</td>
<td>• Locates and effectively uses the following types of information sources:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Defines Internet, World Wide Web, browser and Internet Search Engine</td>
<td>o Periodical Articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reevaluates the nature and extent of the information needed</td>
<td>o News Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Biographical Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Critical reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Government Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Statistical Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Defines Internet, World Wide Web, browser and Internet Search Engine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objective Two: The Information Literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicators</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selects the most appropriate information retrieval system for accessing the needed information.</td>
<td>• Defines three types of information databases: bibliographic, full-text, numeric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Given a need for a particular type of information (overview, research report, news) and an appropriate source (i.e. encyclopedia, scholarly journal, newspaper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Determines the subject scope and years of coverage within a database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructs and implements effectively designed search strategies.</td>
<td>• Identify the main concepts of a search topic and generate a list of search terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Build a search strategy using Boolean operators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compare and contrast a free text search with a controlled terminology search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Define truncation, nesting, field-specific searching, and phrase searching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Retrieves information online or in person using a variety of methods. | • Uses bibliographic database and classification system to physically locate library materials.  
• Uses various information retrieval systems to locate needed information.  
• Locates a specific web site given an Internet address.  
• Conducts an Internet search on a given topic. |
|---|---|
| Refines the search strategy if necessary | • Compares and contrast a database search with an Internet search.  
• Defines and apply an efficient search strategy for a research paper to include:  
  o Choosing a topic and identifying its main concepts  
  o Develops the search strategy using the main topics  
  o Narrows the focus of the topic if necessary  
  o Develops new or additional terminology  
  o Applies new search strategy  
  o Evaluates the need for more or better information. |
| Extracts, records, and manages the information and its sources | • Identifies the bibliographic elements essential for properly citing an information source.  
• Cites information using a standard bibliographic style. |

**Objective three:** The Information Literate Student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

| Summarizes the main idea to be extracted from the information gathered | • Reads the text and main ideas  
• Selects the accurate data to satisfy the query  
• Identifies verbatim material that can then be accurately quoted. |
|---|---|
| Articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources | • Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias.  
• Recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation.  
• Locates supporting documentation  
• Understands and identifies the review process. |
| Compares new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine the value added, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information. | • Determines whether information satisfies the research or other information need  
• Uses consciously selected criteria to determine whether the information contradicts or verifies information used from other sources  
• Draws conclusions based upon information gathered. |
| Determines whether the initial query should be revised. | • Determines if original information need has been satisfied or if additional information is needed  
• Reviews search strategy and incorporates additional concepts as necessary  
• Reviews information retrieval sources used and expands to include others as needed. |

**Objective four:** The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.

| Applies new and prior information to the planning and creation of a particular product or performance | • Organizes the content in a manner that supports the purposes and format of the product or performance  
• Articulates knowledge and skills transferred from prior experiences to planning and creating the product or performance  
• Integrates the new and prior information, including quotations and paraphrasing, in a manner that supports the purposes of the product or the performance. |
|---|---|
| Revises the development process for the product or performance | • Maintains a journal or log of activities related to the information seeking, evaluating, and communication process  
• Reflects on past success, failures, and alternative strategies. |
| Communicates the product or performance effectively to others. | • Chooses a communication medium and format that best supports the purposes of the product or performance and the intended audience  
• Uses a range of information technology applications in creating the product or performance  
• Incorporates principles of design and communication  
• Communicates clearly and with a style that supports the purposes of the intended audience |

**Objective Five:** *The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.*

| The information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology. | • Identifies issues related to privacy and security in both the print and electronic environments  
• Identifies issues related to free vs. fee-based access to information  
• Identifies issues related to censorship and freedom of speech  
• Demonstrates an understanding of intellectual property, copyright, and fair use of copyrighted material |

| The information literate student follows laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources. | • Uses approved passwords and other forms of ID for access to information resources  
• Understands and agrees to institutional policies on access to information resources  
• Preserves the integrity of information resources, equipment, systems and facilities  
• Understands how to legally obtain, store, and disseminate text, data, images, or sounds  
• Demonstrates an understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. |

| The information literate student acknowledges the use of information sources in communicating the product or performance. | • Identifies appropriate documentation styles |
Attachment J

**Application Criteria for Acceptable Projects**

For a course to be used for Objective 4 (Application demonstration) the following characteristics of the application had to be met:

1. Requires a research project with a statement of assignment
2. Requires a written plan
3. Requires a written log of the development process
4. Requires the submission of sources
5. Requires the delivery for external review of a final product.
Objective 4: The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.

Part 1: The student applies new and prior information to the planning and creation of a particular product or performance.

rubric for Part 1:

4: There is a clear, concise purpose statement and outline of the project. The materials include strong evidence that all of the following were addressed in an excellent manner.

- The individual considered information sources of a variety of resource types, examined a substantial number of sources, and included sources of an appropriate scholarly level.
- The sources are appropriately presented and there is a clear indication that appropriate sources have been selected and inappropriate sources have been excluded.

3: There is a concise purpose statement, and satisfactory outline of the project. The materials include evidence that most of the following were adequately addressed:

- The individual considered information sources of a variety of resource types, examined a substantial number of sources, and included sources of an appropriate scholarly level.
- The sources are appropriately presented and there is a clear indication that appropriate sources have been selected and inappropriate sources have been excluded.

2: A purpose statement is given, but it does not clearly identify the product that is to be produced by the project; the outline of the project is sketchy at best. The materials include limited evidence that less than half of the following were reasonably addressed.

- The individual considered information sources of a variety of resource types, examined a substantial number of sources, and included sources of an appropriate scholarly level.
- The sources are appropriately presented and there is a clear indication that appropriate sources have been selected and inappropriate sources have been excluded.

1: A superficial purpose statement is given; the outline of the project is unrelated to the purpose statement. The materials include little evidence that any of the following were even superficially addressed.

- The individual considered information sources of a variety of resource types, examined a substantial number of sources, and included sources of an appropriate scholarly level.
- The sources are appropriately presented and there is a clear indication that appropriate sources have been selected and inappropriate sources have been excluded.
Part 2: The student revises the development process for the product or performance.

**Rubric for Part 2:**

4: The student’s log of information gathering/evaluating activities follows the purpose statement; the log shows the student’s clear evaluation of the usefulness of the information gathered for the project. The log indicates the student’s reflection on past successes and failures in the development of the project.

3: The student’s log shows evidence of research geared toward the purpose statement, using sources from the course and 1 – 2 sources outside the course; the log shows a listing of resources used and abandoned, but no explanation about how these decisions were made.

2: The student’s log reflects that only encyclopedias and in-course texts were used as information sources; the log reflects heavy emphasis on the student’s personal experiences as the major source of information for the project.

1: The student’s log indicates the amount of time spent by the student on the project, and only the student’s personal experiences are used as sources of information for the project.

Part 3: The student communicates the product or performance effectively to others.

**Rubric for Part 3:**

4: The delivery method for the project is appropriate to the discipline/program context and the intended audience; the delivery incorporates a variety of applications, which enhances the communication of the purpose and results of the project. Information technology, when utilized, provides a major enhancement.

3: The delivery method for the project is appropriate to the discipline/program context and is satisfactory for the intended audience; the delivery incorporates an adequate variety of applications, which enhances the communication of the purpose and results of the project. Information technology, when utilized, provides some enhancement.

2: The delivery method for the project distracts from the purpose or results of the project. The delivery incorporates a limited amount of applications, which marginally enhance the communication of the purpose and results of the project. Information technology, when utilized, provides little enhancement.

1: The delivery method for the project is inappropriate from the purpose or results of the project. The delivery incorporates a limited amount of applications, which detract from the communication of the purpose and results of the project. Information technology, when utilized, provides no enhancement.
## Tentative Timeline for the Scientific and Quantitative Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September/ Early October</td>
<td>Regional Meetings</td>
<td>To receive feedback from the Colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Nominate and Invite Item Workshop Participants</td>
<td>To identify workshop participants for pilot project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late October</td>
<td>Mail-out Item Writing Workshop Materials</td>
<td>To provide workshop participants information regarding the workshop process and resources for use at the workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During 1st 2 weeks of November</td>
<td>Conduct 3-day Item Writing Workshop</td>
<td>To produce multiple test items for each of the QR/SR objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 30th</td>
<td>All items due to test coordinator</td>
<td>To provide the test coordinator with any items still outstanding for inclusion in the QR/SR instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Compile Pilot Test and Distribute to workshop participants for review</td>
<td>To allow participants an opportunity to both review and take the QR/SR test for purposes of providing feedback related to the items prior to distribution to the colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Pilot test form compiled, copied and distributed to Colleges.</td>
<td>To provide the Colleges with the materials in order for them to have sufficient time to prepare for administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During Last 2 weeks of February or 1st 2 weeks of March</td>
<td>Colleges administer pilot tests to students</td>
<td>To gather outcome data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 17th</td>
<td>Pilot Tests and Answer Sheets to QR/SR test coordinator</td>
<td>To collect all test copies and answer sheets for scoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 31st</td>
<td>Pilot Tests Scanned and Scored</td>
<td>To organize data in a manageable dataset and calculate total, SR subscale, and QR subscale scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15th</td>
<td>Overall results to VCCS and individual College data sets distributed to Colleges for individual college analysis.</td>
<td>To provide the VCCS with pilot data and individual colleges with the data collected for their students so that they may conduct whatever analysis they deem appropriate for their own use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1st</td>
<td>Item Analysis completed by test coordinator</td>
<td>To establish how each item on the test functioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 30th</td>
<td>Item analysis report mailed-out to workshop participants</td>
<td>To provide workshop participants advanced feedback on how the items functioned during the pilot administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-October</td>
<td>Second Item writing workshop</td>
<td>Replace poorly functioning items and add to item pool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31st</td>
<td>All items due to test coordinator</td>
<td>To provide the test coordinator with any items still outstanding for inclusion in the QR/SR instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 30th</td>
<td>Revised test compiled and sent out to workshop participants for review</td>
<td>To allow participants an opportunity to both review and take the QR/SR test for purposes of providing feedback related to the items prior to distribution to the colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Final revised version compiled, copied, and distributed to colleges</td>
<td>To provide the Colleges with the materials in order for them to have sufficient time to prepare for administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Colleges Administer test to students</td>
<td>To gather outcome data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15th</td>
<td>Tests and Answer Sheets to QR/SR test coordinator</td>
<td>To collect all test copies and answer sheets for scoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 31st</td>
<td>Tests Scanned and Scored</td>
<td>To organize data in a manageable dataset and calculate total, SR subscale, and QR subscale scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15th</td>
<td>Overall results to VCCS and individual College data sets distributed to Colleges for individual college analysis.</td>
<td>To provide the VCCS with pilot data and individual colleges with the data collected for their students so that they may conduct whatever analysis they deem appropriate for their own use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1st</td>
<td>Item Analysis completed by test coordinator</td>
<td>To establish how each item on the test functioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2004</td>
<td>3-day Standard Setting Workshop</td>
<td>To establish cutoff scores for performance as low competent, competent, and highly competent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Oral Communication Assessment Rubric

#### Verbal Effectiveness

**Idea development, use of language, and the organization of ideas are effectively used to achieve a purpose**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advanced (5)</th>
<th>Developing (3)</th>
<th>Emerging (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Ideas are clearly organized, developed, and supported to achieve a purpose; the purpose is clear.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>The introduction gets the attention of the audience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Main points are clear and organized effectively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Supporting material is original, logical, and relevant (facts, examples, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Smooth transitions are used.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>The conclusion is satisfying.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>Language choices are vivid and precise.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>Material is developed for an oral rather than a written presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A.** The Main idea is evident, but the organizational structure may need to be strengthened; ideas may not always flow smoothly.
- **B.** The introduction may not be well-developed.
- **C.** Main points are not always clear.
- **D.** Supporting material may lack in originality or adequate development.
- **E.** Transitions may be awkward.
- **F.** The conclusion may need additional development.
- **G.** Language is appropriate, but word choices are not particularly vivid or precise.

#### Nonverbal Effectiveness

**The nonverbal message supports and is consistent with the verbal message.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advanced (5)</th>
<th>Developing (3)</th>
<th>Emerging (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>The delivery is natural, confident, and enhances the message — posture, eye contact, smooth gestures, facial expressions, volume, pace, etc. indicate confidence, a commitment to the topic, and a willingness to communicate.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>The vocal tone, delivery style, and clothing are consistent with the message.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Limited filler words (“ums”) are used.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Clear articulation and pronunciation are used.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A.** The delivery generally seems effective—however, effective use of volume, eye contact, vocal control, etc. may not be consistent; some hesitancy may be observed.
- **B.** Vocal tone, facial expressions, clothing and other nonverbal expressions do not detract significantly from the message.
- **C.** Filler words are not distracting.
- **D.** Generally, articulation and pronunciation are clear.
- **E.** Over dependence on notes may be observed.

- **A.** The delivery detracts from the message; eye contact may be very limited; the presenter may tend to look at the floor, mumble, speak inaudibly, fidget, or read most or all of the speech; gestures and movements may be jerky or excessive.
- **B.** The delivery may appear inconsistent with the message.
- **C.** Filler words (“ums,”) are used excessively.
- **D.** Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy.
- **E.** Over dependence on notes may be observed.

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### Appropriateness
*Idea development, use of language, and the organization of ideas for a specific audience, setting, and occasion are appropriate. Communication is respectful.*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Language is familiar to the audience, appropriate for the setting, and free of bias; the presenter may “code-switch” (use a different language form) when appropriate.</td>
<td>A. Language used is not disrespectful or offensive. B. Topic selection and examples are not inappropriate for the audience, occasion, or setting; some effort to make the material relevant to audience interests, the occasion, or setting is evident. C. The delivery style, tone of voice, and clothing choices do not seem out-of-place or disrespectful to the audience.</td>
<td>A. Language is questionable or inappropriate for a particular audience, occasion, or setting. Some biased or unclear language may be used. B. Topic selection does not relate to audience needs and interests. C. The delivery style may not match the particular audience or occasion—the presenter’s tone of voice or other mannerisms may create alienation from the audience; clothing choices may also convey disrespect for the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Topic selection and examples are interesting and relevant for the audience and occasion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Delivery style and clothing choices suggest an awareness of expectations and norms.</td>
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### Responsiveness
*Communication may be modified based on verbal and nonverbal feedback. Speakers/listeners demonstrate active listening behaviors.*

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<tr>
<td>A. The presenter uses materials to keep the audience engaged. B. Material is modified or clarified as needed given audience verbal and nonverbal feedback. C. Reinforcing verbal listening responses such as paraphrasing or restating are used if needed when answering questions; responses to audience questions are focused and relevant. D. Nonverbal behaviors are used to keep the audience engaged such as maintaining eye contact, modifying delivery style if needed, and using reinforcing nonverbal listening responses (nodding, leaning forward, etc.) when answering questions.</td>
<td>A. The presenter is able to keep the audience engaged most of the time. B. When feedback indicates a need for idea clarification, the speaker makes an attempt to clarify or restate ideas. C. Responses to audience questions are generally relevant but little elaboration may be offered. D. Generally, the speaker demonstrates audience awareness through such nonverbal behaviors as tone, movement, and eye contact with the whole audience; some reinforcing nonverbal listening responses are periodically used when answering questions.</td>
<td>A. The presenter is not able to keep the audience engaged. B. The verbal or nonverbal feedback from the audience may suggest a lack of interest or confusion. C. Responses to audience questions may be undeveloped or unclear. D. The nonverbal aspects of delivery do not indicate an awareness of audience reactions; reinforcing nonverbal listening responses such as using eye contact, facing the person, etc. are not used when answering questions. E. Poise or composure is lost during any distractions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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